

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

December 16, 2019

The Honorable Mark T. Esper
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

General Mark A. Milley
Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff
9999 Joint Staff Pentagon
Washington, DC 20318-9999

Dear Secretary Esper and Chairman Milley:

We write to express our concern regarding the potential use of white nationalist gestures by Army cadets and Navy midshipmen at the 2019 Army-Navy Game. During a nationally televised broadcast, at least three individuals separately used a hand gesture that was added earlier this year to Anti-Defamation League's (ADL) Hate Symbols Database as an "expression of white supremacy."

We applaud the quick action by both the United States Naval Academy and the United States Military Academy to establish investigations to determine the intent of these individuals. Unfortunately, we must consider the prospect that these actions were intentional and malicious. In the last year alone, we have observed multiple Naval academy graduates at VFA-106 use racist language in a chat group titled "pure bloods", a U.S. Coast Guard officer use the "white power" gesture on television, and a U.S. Coast Guard officer who was a former Marine plot a white supremacy inspired domestic terror attack.

The potential use of a symbol of hate by any cadet or midshipman is unacceptable. The U.S. Armed Forces and their associated academies are no place for racist or unprofessional behavior, as embodied by the U.S. Military Academy's mission to graduate "leader[s] of character committed to the values of Duty, Honor, Country" and the U.S. Naval Academy's mission to prepare "professional officers of competence, character, and compassion." Attending a military academy is a privilege; one that requires cadets and midshipmen take personal and collective responsibility for their actions and maintain an awareness of how those actions will be interpreted.

Independent of a potential association with the white supremacist movement, we are troubled by the clear lack of discipline in our future military leaders. George Washington said, "discipline is the soul of an Army, it makes small numbers formidable; procures success of the weak and esteem to all." It is paramount that each cadet and midshipman understands that when they don their uniforms, they are representing their academy, their service, and our nation, and exhibit at all times the discipline required by military service.

We request that you give these investigations the attention they deserve, that those involved will be held appropriately accountable at the conclusion, and that you will continue to work with Congress to ensure that our military personnel meet our standards for professional conduct.

Sincerely,



Anthony G. Brown
Member of Congress



Jackie Speier
Member of Congress



Karen Bass
Member of Congress

CC: The Honorable Ryan D. McCarthy, Secretary of Army
The Honorable Thomas B. Modly, Acting Secretary of Navy
General James C. McConville, Army Chief of Staff
Admiral Michael Gilday, Chief of Naval Operations